

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

- 5           1. A data management method comprising:  
          processing an electronic cover to obtain a document image and to validate  
          data elements related to the document;  
          based on information contained in the cover, automatically collecting data  
          and populating at least some data fields in the cover by linking the at least  
10       some data fields to independent software applications; and  
          storing at least some of the data populated in the cover for reuse by the  
          independent software applications.
2. The method of claim 1, further including reusing the data populated in  
15       the cover by automatically indexing the populated data in an imaging  
          application.
3. The method of claim 2, further including the independent software  
20       applications using the cover to review a submission.
4. The method of claim 2, further including the independent software  
          applications using the cover to update a request status.
5. The method of claim 2, further including the independent software  
25       applications using the cover to initiate a workflow for subsequent processing.
6. The method of claim 3, further including feeding collected data to one or  
          more independent software applications.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein processing the electronic cover includes setting an electronic checklist to validate critical data elements related to the document.

5        8. The method of claim 7, wherein the critical data elements include a customer number.

9. The method of claim 7, wherein the critical data elements include a contract number.

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10. The method of claim 7, wherein the critical data elements include a mode of transmittal.

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11. The method of claim 7, wherein the critical data elements include a new transaction.

12. The method of claim 7, wherein the critical data elements include an update.

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13. The method of claim 1, wherein the information contained in the cover includes a customer master record.

14. A computer program, comprising:

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a first set of program instructions for generating an electronic cover form;

a second set of program instructions for processing user supplied data entered into fields of the electronic cover form to obtain a document image and to validate data elements related to the document; and

a third set of program instructions for automatically collecting data and populating at least some data fields in the cover form as a function of the user

entered data, by linking the at least some data fields to independent software applications.

5 15. The computer program of claim 14, further including a fourth set of program instructions for reusing the data populated in the cover form by automatically indexing the populated data in an imaging application.

10 16. The computer program of claim 15, wherein the independent software applications use the cover form to perform any one or more of the following steps: reviewing a submission; updating a status of a request; or initiating a workflow for subsequent processing.

15 17. The computer program of claim 14, wherein the electronic cover form includes an electronic checklist that validate critical data elements related to the document.

20 18. The computer program of claim 17, wherein the critical data elements include any one or more of: a customer number, a contract number, a mode of transmittal, a new transaction, or an update.

19. The computer program of claim 14, wherein the information contained in the cover form includes a customer master record.

25 20. A data management device for integrating the operation of a plurality of independent software applications, comprising:

means for processing an electronic cover to obtain a document image and to validate data elements related to the document;

means for automatically collecting data and populating at least some data fields in the cover, based on information contained in the cover, by linking the at least some data fields to independent software applications; and

- 5 means for storing at least some of the data populated in the cover for reuse by the independent software applications.

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